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# Solvent found in brook raises concern in Beverly

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**BEVERLY** — Elevated levels of an industrial solvent found in a brook have prompted the city conservation commission to ask local health officials to assess public risk.

"The very elevated level of [the solvent] is of concern, particularly because the brook is in the vicinity of two schools," said David Lang, chairman of the conservation commission. "I have suggested we get the Board of Health involved."

William Burke, director of public health in Beverly, said yesterday that he did not have enough information to comment.

Between 1950 and 1973, Varian Associates owned a business at 150 Sohler Road and dumped tens of thousands of gallons of solvents used in the production of electron tubes onto land that drained into two brooks. One of the brooks flows past the Shore Country Day School and Beverly High School.

Varian ceased dumping the solvents in 1973, and has since sold the business and hired IT Corp. of Norwood to determine the extent of the pollution and start extracting the solvents from the ground.

Spencer Sias, a spokesman for the Palo Alto-based company now known as Varian Medical Systems Inc., said, "We are certain that the public is absolutely not at risk, and that the cleanup is proceeding."

In May, an analysis of the environmental damage that took nine years to compile was sent to Beverly officials and the state Department of Environmental Protection. It is not easy reading; the paperwork fills 93 books and an additional seven file cabinets at the public library. Just the paper alone weighs some 32 pounds, according to citizens that have tried to comprehend the contents.

"This whole thing has been very frustrating. We try to figure out what's going on, we try to organize, but most of the folks around here are working 9-to-5 jobs," said Jo-

seph Coppola, a retired school teacher and a resident of Longview Terrace.

Coppola recalled farmers and gardeners irrigating their crops with the discolored water flowing from what was then the Varian property. Major episodes of discoloration stopped in 1973, when the state required Varian to build an onsite waste treatment facility.

Steven Connolly, a property owner near the former Varian site who has been involved in litigation with the company regarding pollution issues, provided several documents to the conservation commission, one of which had culled numbers from the 32-pound analysis.

It indicates a brook several hundred feet downstream from the old plant sampled at 150 parts per billion of trichloroethylene several months ago. The solvent breaks down in the environment into other compounds, one of which is the carcinogen vinyl chloride.

Paul Locke, a risk assessor for the state Department of Environmental Protection, said the concentration "is reason for further study, but is not a cause for great concern."

Historically, Varian has attributed the source of the pollution to such euphemistic phrases as "waste over time," documents given the conservation commission quote former employees in affidavits describing how they systematically dumped solvents down the drain — and into brooks — for more than two decades.

"Such descriptions might be appalling to read now, but the truth is that this kind of disposal was quite common 40 years ago," said Stephen Roberson, a state environmental analyst familiar with the Varian cleanup. "Two decades of dumping is consistent with the pollution we're finding today," he added. "And while we don't know everything about the situation yet, I am satisfied no one's health is at risk."